

NATHANIEL EVANS


A POET OF COLONIAL AMERICA



By

EDGAR LEGARE PENNINGTON

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Taylor Printing Company
Ocala, Florida
1935

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PART I

EVANS THE POET

With the revival of interest in early American art and letters, it is time to survey the life and works of a much neglected poet of colonial days, Nathaniel Evans. A native of one of the most promising young cities in the new world, a product of an infant academy destined to become a great educational institution, an exemplar of the purest ideals and aspirations. Evans is a type of colonial America at its best. Immature as his output may have been, he might well serve as a landmark in the progress of American culture. He died at twenty-five; and his untimely end was regarded as a calamity by those who watched his literary adventures. The reader of our day, however, will not find in Evans another Keats. The American poet was feeling his way to the end; he was still enthralled by classical imagery and the style and rhythm of the Seventeenth Century. He was bound by provincial concepts and strong moral inhibitions. His world was the bank of the Schuylkill; his sages, the tutors of the newly founded College of Philadelphia. But his very limitations have stamped him as America's own.

Nathaniel Evans was born in Philadelphia, June 8th, 1742. Of his first schooling we know little. He is said to have attended a Moravian boarding school at Germantown, which was opened in 1746. (1) Soon after the Academy of Philadelphia was opened, Evans was entered as a pupil; and later, when the collegiate part of the institution was begun, he continued his studies there. He spent about six years in "Grammar Learning;" then his parents, who looked forward to a mercantile career, made him an apprentice. It was discovered that his inclination did not lead that way, however; for, as his beloved teacher, Doctor William Smith, the provost of the College, said, "he devoted more of his time to the service of the Muses than to the business of the *Counting-House*." Soon after the expiration of his apprenticeship, he returned to the College, where he applied himself diligently to philosophy and the sciences. At the commencement, May 30th, 1765, "on account of his great merit and promising genius, he was, by special *Mandate* of the *Trustees*, upon the recommendation of the *Provost* and Faculty of Professors, complimented with a DIPLOMA for the degree of *Master of Arts*; although he had not taken the previous degree of *Bachelor of Arts*, on account, of the interruption in his course of studies, during the term of his Apprenticeship." (2) Doctor Smith was very fond of his pupil, and took a personal interest in his ambitions and activities. It was largely through his affection for the young man that the literary remains which we now possess were published and preserved.

(1) Archives of New Jersey, 1st series, XXV., p. 483.

(2) Sketch of Evans, by the Rev. William Smith, prefixed to Evans: Poems (1772), pp. iii-iv.

There was at the time a group of ambitious literary men in Philadelphia. Beside Evans, there were such poets as Francis Hopkinson and Thomas Godfrey. They possessed high ideals and were eager to develop literature in America. Godfrey was a warm friend of Evans. He was the son of Thomas Godfrey, the inventor of the quadrant; and was born in 1736. At the age of twenty-two, he composed a drama, called *The Prince of Parthia*, which was the first play written, acted, and printed in America. He died in 1763; and when his poems were published two years later—the year of Evans's graduation—a preface entitled "Some account of the Author and his Writings" was included in the volume, the work of none other than Evans. Here we have an example of Evans's prose style and an opportunity to observe the loftiness of purpose which characterised the young man.

Thus Evans speaks of his deceased comrade:-

"Thus hastily was snatched off, in the prime of manhood, this very promising genius, beloved, and lamented, by all who knew him. What is here presented to the public, is a collection of those sweet effusions which flowed with a noble wildness from his elevated soul. Free and unpremeditated he sung, unskill'd in any precepts, but what were infused into him by nature, his divine tutoress. The Public must judge, whether, from these youthful emanations he does not appear to have been animated with the genuine poetic flame.—But whatever desert he may be allowed as a poet, it will be render'd still more / conspicuous by his character as a man. His sweet amiable disposition, his integrity of heart, his engaging modesty and diffidence of manners, his fervent and disinterested love for his friends, endeared him to all those who shared his acquaintance, and have stamped the image of him, in indelible characters, on the hearts of his more intimate friends." (3)

Had Evans and his friends felt more or less on the defensive, because they had dared to pursue the Muses in the pietistic atmosphere of colonial Pennsylvania? We suspect as much from the following.

"A late Writer excellently observes, that it is doing some service to human Society, *to amuse innocently*; and they know very little of human nature, who think it can bear to be always employed either in the exercise of its duties, or in high and important meditations—Those arts, therefore, that instruct as well as entertain *innocently*, surely, in some measure, deserve our attention; and they who excel in them, the notice of the public. Considered purely in a political sense, the works of genius are, of all others, the cheapest entertainments. Never was there a state, however barbarous and ignorant, that did not glory in her men of ingenuity; and such were never wanting in any state,

(3) Thomas Godfrey: *Juvenile Poems* (1765), preface by Evans, pp. vi.-vii.

where proper incitements were offered for study and labour." (4)

Evans contributed an *Elegy* to his friend's memory. It was included in the volume of Godfrey's poems, and later in the posthumous collection of the works of Evans.

"O Death! thou victor of the human frame!
The soul's poor fabrick trembles at thy name!
How long shall man be urg'd to dread thy sway
For those whom thou untimely tak'st away?
Life's blooming spring just opens to our eyes,
And strikes the senses with a sweet surprize,
When thy fierce arm uplifts the fatal blow
That hurls us breathless to the earth below.

"Sudden as darts the lightning thro' the sky
Around the globe thy various weapons fly:
Here war's red engines heap the field with slain,
And pallid sickness there extends thy reign:
Here the soft Virgin weeps her Lover dead,
There Maiden beauty sinks the graceful head,
Here Infants grieve their Parents are no more,
There rev'rent Sires their Childrens deaths deplore.
Here the sad friend—O! save the sacred name,
Yields half his soul to thy relentless claim;
O pardon, pardon the descending tear!
Friendship commands, and not the Muses here."

Evans proceeds to describe the state of death, so shortly to be his fate!

"There, where no fears invade, nor ills molest,
Thy soul shall dwell immortal with the blest;
In that bright realm, where dearest friends no more
Shall from each other's throbbing breasts be tore,
Where all those glorious spirits sit enshrin'd,
The just, the good, the virtuous of mankind.
There shall fair angels in a radiant ring,
And the great SON of Heav'ns eternal KING,
Proclaim thee welcome to the blissful skies,
And wipe the tears for ever from thy eyes."

These lines are reminiscent of *Lycidas*. The poet next pays a tribute to his departed friend's splendid gifts and promise; and ends with a classical injunction to the stranger, who "by fortune's hand, / tost on the baleful *Carolinian* strand," (where Godfrey died) to "lave" the sacred spot where he lies with "tears of sorrow," and "shade it with ne'er fading bays."

It may be noted that one of Godfrey's poems, *A Cantata, on Peace*. 1763, was dedicated "To Mr. N. E." We infer that the friendship was mutual.

Several years before the death of Godfrey, young Evans had been writing verse. He seems to have perceived the barrenness of literary culture in his native land; for, at sixteen, he wrote a poem in which he enquired whether or not this new world would ever feel the Muses' fire, the charm of beauty, and the inspiration of noble deeds. This juvenile effort, written in 1758 and included in his collected poems fourteen years later, is a remarkable feat. It reveals its youthful author as a serious, thoughtful boy, infatuated with the lore of the ancients and zealous to reproduce the glory of bygone days in the land which alone he knew. *Daphnis and Menalcas, a pastoral eclogue, written 1758*, truly reveals loftiness of aspiration. Why should the old world enjoy a monopoly of the artistic?

"Shall fam'd Arcadia own the tuneful choir,
And fair Silicia boast the matchless lyre?
Shall Gallia's groves resound with heav'nly lays,
And Albion's poets claim immortal bays?
And this new world ne'er feel the muse's fire;
No beauties charm us, or no deeds inspire?
O Pennsylvania! shall no son of thine
Glow with the raptures of the sacred nine?
Ne'er rouse the soul, by strokes of magic kind,
Just war to wage, or humanize mankind;
With sweetest sounds the virgin's soul control,
Or in Elysium wrap the lover's soul?

"Fir'd with the thought, I court the Sylvan muse,
Her magic influence o'er me to diffuse;
Whilst I aspire to wake the rural reed,
And sing of swains, whose snowy lambkins feed
On *Schuylkill's* banks, with shady walnuts crown'd,
And bid the vales with music melt around."

At sunrise, two swains appear, or rather,

"Soon as the rays that gild the orient dawn,
Ting'd the blue hills, and pearl'd each dewy lawn."

They rise up; and seek a hill "where purple violets bloom'd, / and fragrant scents the downy air perfum'd; / close by whose side there stray'd a murmur'ing brook." There they recline; and a conversation ensues.

First, Menalcas speaks of the beauties of Nature.

"See Nature's sweets profusely round display'd,
Flow'rs paint the lawn, and green bedecks the shade;
The feather'd choir in carols hail the day,
And new-blown hawthorns feel yon heav'nly ray;
Pomona spreads her dulcet charms around,
And buxom Pan o'erleaps the pregnant ground."

In such a lovely setting, why should Daphnis be melancholy? "Each face but his congenial smiles adorn."

In response, Daphnis admits the joy and beauty which animate Nature.

“But lawns, and hills, and vales and groves around,
Are nought to Daphnis but an empty sound.”

Indeed, cruel Delia “has unfaithful prov’d, / and slights the swain that oft she swore she lov’d.” Has he not cause, he asks, “to break all Nature’s and all Reason’s laws,” and plunge headlong from the mountain’s brow and end his sorrows in the waves below?

Menalcas is sceptical. He cannot believe that charming Delia could break her vow. But Daphnis assures him that,—

“Milder than Delia flinty rocks are grown,
For in sad echoes they return my moan;
But haughty Delia scorns my ardent flame,
And bids her shepherd woo some humbler dame!”

Still Menalcas will not be convinced. He protests that,

“The sportful trouts may leave their wat’ry plains,
To dwell in woods, and tune spontaneous strains;
The warbling linnets may in rivers glide,
And dash the billows with the dolphin’s pride;
Yon distant steers, that drag the heavy plough,
May, like the squirrel, spring from bough to bough—
But heav’nly Delia cannot faithless prove,
Nor barter for vile gain her promis’d love!”

Daphnis, on the other hand, declares that woman is fickle.

“The breeze that shakes the spangl’d dew-drops round,
The swelling floods that burst the meadow’s bound,
Are not more wav’ring than the female mind!
Wild as the waves, unstable as the wind!”

In reply, Menalcas contends that Daphnis is too harsh to women in general. Though one of “the beauteous race” may prove unfaithful, it does not follow that “all are base.” He bids his companion beguile his woe with his sweet pipe, while from his own reed “spontaneous notes shall flow.” In the meantime, the flocks are scattering. It is time to “chaunt the Sylvan strain.” Daphnis assents.

“Come then, Menalcas! tuneful shepherd rise,
Thy song shall praise the SOVEREIGN of the skies;
Whilst I will join in that exalted theme,
Nor more repeat the faithless fair-one’s name!”

The same year (1758), Evans addressed a poem to a friend who had suffered sorrow. In this *Ode to a Friend*, he urged that care and dread be banished. If God wills life or death, he argued, man is helpless in any event and need not worry. A fatalistic viewpoint, however, should be no warrant for license and self-indulgence.

"But not in pleasure's Syren-charms,
I mean to lose the heart:
I know that mirth has sad alarms
Where wisdom has no part.

"But let passion's easy gale,
Thy bark with rapture sweep,
While powerful reason shall prevail
And guide her o'er the deep.

"Then cheerful flow thy transient breath,
With courage arm thy heart;
Immortal life begins in death,
And smiles at his grim dart."

The *Epistolary Ode To a Friend*, written probably about the same time, shows the influence of Horace. The restless man, never satisfied with that lot which Fortune has put in his way, is contrasted with the man of strength and poise. First, Evans depicts the one who thirsts for things beyond his reach, like "Lybia's burning sand, or the parch'd Arabian plain," which would drink the unfathomable seas, yet "endless craves, and restless pines in every state."

"O place him with the worst of slaves,
Whether in high or low estate;
Heap him around with massy wealth,
High-throne him on the seat of pow'r;
Each generous joy he'll use by stealth,
While want shall prey on ev'ry hour.
Let glitt'ring pomp allure his soul,
Or nobler fame his mind dilate;
Thro' complicated plagues he'll roll,
And dire vexations still create."

The opposite type is seen in the man,—

"He who contented spends his days—
Calm as the clear unruffled stream,
His life in gentle current strays,
Mild as the maiden's silver dream.
Be he born to till the field,
Or in war the sword to wield;
If he o'er the midnight oil,
Wastes his life in learned toil,
Studios to instruct mankind
Where true happiness to find:
Or if o'er the lawless main,
He roams in search of sordid gain;
Or sorts with nobles in proud ease,
Or humble swains in cottages;
Be he with *content* but blest—
He's the *happy man* confest!"

So the poet urges his friend, Strephon, to "herd not with ambitious slaves," nor join "the vulgar throng—their joys unstable as the waves."

"O leave the ruthless scenes of war,
Unfit art thou for rude alarms,
Beside thy gentle Delaware,
Come, Strephon, seek more pleasing charms."

General Wolfe's death, in September, 1759, was greatly lamented throughout the British colonies; and Evans rose to the occasion in a *Panegyric Ode*. Doubtless the early settlers of Quebec and its vicinity looked on their surroundings as prosaic realities, dread symbols of hardship and struggle; but not so the poet of seventeen. The late hero was extolled as Achilles; there was an epic grandeur in his campaign.

"Where great ST. LAWRENCE rolls its awful flood,
He daring led Britannia's warrior-band,
Scal'd its proud banks, and pierc'd the desert (sic)
wood,
That veils the horrors of the hostile land."

He described the General's passing away.

"Such are the chiefs that merit fair renown,
And follow bold where glory leads the way!
Such are the chiefs that grace a monarch's crown,
And from the muse demand th'immortal lay!
Chiefs that from Albion's billow-beaten shore,
Can risque the perils af th'Atlantic flood,
And dauntless ride thro' fields bedew'd with gore,
To bathe their youthful arms in Gallic blood!
Proud in the cause of honour to expire,
To stem the onset of the hostile band;
And dare the deep-mouth'd cannon's thund'rous fire,
To crown with joy Britannia's happy land."

The *Ode* concludes with a note of triumph.

"Tho' Wolfe shall shine in flaming arms no more,
Now thron'd in bliss above the cloudless skies,
Cease, O ye sons of Britain, to deplore,
Whilst Brunswick reigns, yet other Wolfes shall
rise!"

We are giving in its entirety the *Elegy / to the / Memory of Theophilus Grew, / A. M. Professor of Mathematics / in the College of Philadelphia*. We feel that it discloses the mental and spiritual processes which were forming the character of our youthful poet. It shows the fine sense of loyalty. Evans was strongly influenced by his school-masters, because he regarded them as models for emulation.

“Why will soft sorrow thus o’erwhelm my soul,
And heart-felt anguish ev’ry thought control?
To scenes of woe why will the muse retire,
And cull sad-sounding accents for the lyre?
What shade neglected asks the gentle tear,
To bathe in grief the long forgotten bier?

“’Tis GREW descends unheeded to the grave,
With no libation of Castalia’s wave.
What tho’ the theme transcends my artless lays,
The muse shall swell her numbers in thy praise:
The murm’ring streams shall echo to the sound,
And groves responsive spread the strains around;
Slow winds shall bear the heavy notes along,
And distant hills return the mournful song.

“T’enlarge the soul, and clear the dubious mind,
T’unfold celestial wonders to mankind,
To stamp bright knowledge on thy youthful care,
With sweet persuasion and endearing air,
With gentle manners to entice the heart,
Was once thy happy and peculiar art.
But snatch’d, alas! to yon immortal plains,
Where glorious angels hymn seraphic strains;
High where yon beamy orbs, resplendent, glow,
He drops a tear for this sad world below.
But GREW, thy planets downward shall be hurl’d,
And wild confusion sink a guilty world;
E’en time’s white fore-lock shall in chains be bound,
Earth melt to dross, and Cynthia cease her round.
Then shall oblivion blast the hero’s fame,
The pomp of monarchs, and the poet’s flame;
Then thy good name with matter’s self shall blend,
Forgot the father, husband, and the friend.

“Quick as the shuttle fly all human things,
Time wafts us rapid on his fleeting wings;
Soon shall the swain that turns this plaintive lyre,
Kiss the cold earth, and all his flame expire;
Then may some muse, by tender pity mov’d,
Moan in soft elegy the youth she lov’d.
Yet blooming virtue shall triumphant rise,
Spurn the dull earth, and gain her native skies;
Then shall the just with holy raptures fir’d,
With charms transported, and with God inspir’d,
Strike their gold harps, and wake the lofty chord,
In joyful chorus mind th’eternal Lord!

“Oh! may my soul by thy example warm’d,
With Virtue’s rules, and Virtue’s sons be charm’d;
Regard them tho’ they shine in humble state,
Far from the glitter of the wealthy great.

Blest men in counsel as in sense profound,
True to thy trust, and ever blameless found;
Stranger to strife, a noble mind confest,
No raging discord harbour'd in thy breast;
Peaceful thou walk'd this wild of 'weeds and flowers.'
Where envy hisses, and blind fortune show'rs;
Where systems endless frantic zeal inspire,
Warm youth they madden, and cold age they fire,
Led by no mode, thou follow'd Nature's laws,
And trusted in the one unerring *cause*!

"Thus pass'd thy footsteps thro' this mazy round,
Whilst thy wing'd genius soar'd to worlds around;
Till grisly death with darkness clos'd thy eyes,
And angels snatch'd thy spirit to the skies!
But GOD is wise—then, to his righteous sway,
Submit, my muse, and cease thy plaintive lay."

A *Riddle*, Written 1759 is a rather immature effort at humour. The *Ode on the prospect of peace*, 1761, abounds in classical allusions. Sol, Eurus, Boreas, Iris, Bellona, Sylvania, Euphrosyne—all are present. But the reader must recall that the author had not reached the age of twenty; and his youthful imagination was aflame with the wonders of the past. This latter poem breathes the longing for peace. (The Seven Years war was a very vital subject in the American colonies).

"Bounteous PEACE with lavish hand,
To ev'ry shore thy blessings strew,
O veil the blood-polluted land,
And all thy grateful joys renew.
Thy blissful pregnant reign restore,
And calm the breasts of angry kings,
Thy horn of Amalthean store
Ope, and expand thy golden wings;
Till trade secure her treasure beams,
And science re-assumes her shades;
Till shepherds quaff untainted streams,
And hinds enjoy their native glades;
Till the glad muses strike the lyre,
And virtuous social deeds inspire;
Till the loud drum no more shall bid to arms prepare,
Nor brazen trumpets breath horrid din of war.

"Auspicious pow'r, whose salutary ray
Form'd this new world, and rear'd her infant
fame,
Extend anew thy mitigating sway,
And quell the hero's battle-breathing flame.
Ye fragrant myrtles, ope your peaceful bow'rs,
And charm the warrior with your pleasing scenes,

Shield him with woodbine's aromatic flow'rs,
And for his sopha spread your velvet greens.
For him the flute mellifluous shall blow—
In Lydian music, sounding soft and low,
And blooming beauty with attractive art,
Shall sweetly melt the tumults of his heart;
The nectar'd bowl with rosy garlands twin'd,
Shall waft his sorrows to the vargrant wind,
While the victorious laurel of renown,
In verdant wreaths his manly brows shall crown.

"Too long has war's terrific train,
(The barbed spear and reeking blade)
Made nations rue their chieftains slain,
And sanguin'd every muse's shade.
From distant Vola's rapid floods,
To Canada's high-tow'ring woods,
Has the deadly cannon bray'd."

The author speaks of the recent wars; and remarks,

"But victory enough has wav'd her glitt'ring wand,
With British honors grac'd, o'er ev'ry prostrate land!"

Hence, it is time for Peace to descend, "and smooth Bellona's haggard brow."

"Thus driv'n from earth *war's* horrid train—
O PEACE, thou nymph divine, draw near!
Here let the muses *fix* their reign,
And crown with fame each rolling year,
Source of joy and genuine pleasure,
Queen of quiet, queen of leisure,
Haste thy votaries to cheer!"

In Pennsylvania, the poet concludes, the men freed from war's distractions might have opportunity to develop their finer self.

A *Rural Ode*, Written by the Author at the Age of Sixteen, contains some very pretty figures. The scene is laid on the banks of the familiar Schuylkill; but into the picture are brought Phoebus, Hygeia, Favonius, the Dryads, and the Naiads.

The *Ode to a Friend* shows the influence of Horace. The *Hymn to May* was doubtless written under the inspiration of Milton. The verse is quite graceful.

"Now had the beam of Titan gay
Usher'd in the blissful May,
Scatt'ring from his pearly bed,
Fresh dew on ev'ry mountain's head;
Nature mild and debonair,

To thee, fair maid, yields up her care.
May, with gentle, plastic hand,
Clothes in flow'ry robe the land;
O'er the vales the cowslips spreads,
And eglantine beneath the shades;
Violets blue, befringe each fountain;
Hyacinths their sweets diffuse,
And the rose its blush renews;
With the rest of *Flora's* train,
Decking lowly dale or plain."

An *Anacreontic Ode*, which we transcribe in full, voices the old injunction to banish melancholy and seek solace in the cup.

"Hence with sorrow, spleen and care!
Muse, awake the jocund air;
Wreath thy brows in myrtle twine,
And assist the gay design;
Strike the trembling string with pleasure,
Till it sound the enchanting measure.

"Avaunt! thou fiend, pale melancholy!
We are mortals free and jolly,
Who delight to lose the soul,
In the joy-inspiring bowl—
Fill the foaming chalice high,
Till it speak with extasy;
With rosy garland crown the wine,
And steep *Nepenthe*, herb divine,
In the bright nectareous cup,
Till it swallows sadness up.

"Wine can dullest mortals raise,
To deeds of glory, deeds of praise;
If the warrior's breast it warms,
Quick he burns for glorious arms,
And nightly dreams of battles dire,
Of giants huge in steel attire;
Battlements he proud, o'erthrows,
And rides amidst a thousand foes.
Thus, when Philip's dauntless son,
With his drinking bouts had done.
He rush'd a whirlwind on the plain,
And mountain'd it with heaps of slain,
If wine inspires the tuneful band;
Who can the glowing strain withstand?

"Floods of music, all divine
Pour along in every line;
And the wild *Dithyrambic* strain,
Rushes thro' the poet's brain,

Alcaeus loved the purple juice;
Sprightly Flaccus felt its use;
And the sweet Anacreon,
Warbled best when *half-seas* gone.
Ivy-crown'd BACCHUS hail!
And, o'er my *reeling* song prevail!"

The pastoral poet must have his love; and Evans greets his lady, true to form. The following is the first poem in the collection in honour of the fair sex. It is copied in full.

SONG. EXTEMPORE.

"The sprightly eye, the rosy cheek,
The dimpled chin, and look so meek,
The nameless grace and air;
The ruby lip in sweetness drest,
The softly-swelling angel breast—
All these adorn my fair!

"See! what unnumber'd beauties rove
Around each feature of my love,
And fire my rapt'rous soul!
Ten thousand sweets her looks disclose;
At ev'ry look my bosom glows,
And yields to love's control.

"Just heav'ns! why gave ye charms like these,
With ev'ry graceful art to please,
To her whom rigid fate,
Permits me not my pain to tell,
And makes me sacred truth conceal
From one I wish my mate.

"Curse on the sordid thirst of gold!
When tend'rest passions all are sold
To win the world's applause;
When, for desire, and love, and joy,
Low interest shall our hours employ,
And gain th'ignoble cause."

He addressed a song *To Sylvia*, after her recovery from a fit of sickness; and told how he rejoiced at her return to health.

"When at bleak WINTER'S stern command,
Fair nature's blooming beauties fade,
And the sad groves all leafless stand,
And wither'd is each pleasing shade;

"No nightingale, or linnet gay,
Is heard to wake the sprightly strain,
No turtle pours her love-lorn lay,
To sooth the soul of am'rous swain.

“But when the jovial hours appear,
That usher in the vernal breeze,
When young-ey’d spring bedecks the year,
And clothes in verdant robe the trees;

“The feather’d choristers prepare
To swell the gratulating song,
While thro’ the soft expanse of air,
Wild Music sweetly floats along.”

In another song, we are told that the poet had scorned female power until the coming of Sylvia. Then,

“Her lucid eyes shot forth a flame,
That hardest hearts would wound.”

And the Song ends with this advice:-

“Deluded swains, who, vainly proud,
Assume gay freedom’s air,
And, boastful, scorn the profligate crowd
That sigh before the fair!

“If once fair Sylvia you should meet,
And view her heavn’ly mien;
To Love converted, at her feet,
You’ll hug the pleasing chain.”

An Ode, Attempted in the Manner of Horace, to my ingenious friend, Mr. Thomas Godfrey, bewails the struggles which poets must now endure, since the days of patronage are over. Today, alas,

“ * * * We are in a climate cast
Where few the muse can relish;
Where all the doctrine now that’s told,
Is that a shining heap of gold
Alone can man embellish.”

A Song To Mira; on Parting, is a conventional protest. Can Mira consent to leave her lover?

Evans attempted to paraphrase the Psalms, as many poets had tried before him. For the 97th Psalm, he employed the heroic couplet. For Psalm 145, he used the iambic tetrameter couplet. The 137th Psalm was rendered in quatrains of iambic tetrameter, the lines rhymed alternately. There was little chance for originality in such efforts.

It was a custom in Philadelphia for the lads who delivered the newspapers to present to their customers, on New Year’s day, a copy of verses reciting some of the most signal occurrences and transactions of the past year. For this, the boys received a small gratuity. The boys usually agreed with some young poet to write the poem; and Evans wrote the verses for 1762 and 1763. In his *Verses for the New Year*

1762, he dwelt principally on the French War this side of the Atlantic. Britannia's arms had at last restored peace, he said; and now "smiling Ceres paints the pregnant soil." Great Britain's fame extends to India; King George's arms have prevailed over Europe.

Evans celebrated the completion of his one-and-twentieth year with an Ode. A mature man, it was time to be serious, he declared. (The reader can hardly imagine him ever frivolous).

"Adieu! amusements of my youth,
My childhood and my boyish days!
For virtue, probity, and truth,
I quit my sports and frolic lays!
Yet with remembrance bring to view
The years in playful bliss, that flew,
When careless of the passing hours,
My whistle sweet I blew, or cull'd the muse's flow'rs!"

He described his youth, his swimming in the Schuylkill and the Delaware, his hunting and fishing, his walks, and his dreams.

"But hence, ye dear delusions all,
'Tis time I tear you from my breast;
Methinks! I hear sweet Reason call,
'Be not with empty dreams possess!'—
Away, ye pleasing shade away,
I brook no longer fond delay—
Reluctant still ye from me fly,
Your airy forms I see yet flit before my eye!

"But come, thou habitant of heav'n!
Inspirer of each gallant deed;
Virtue, bright queen, to whom 'tis given
The soul for purer joys to breed;
High-arch'd, o'er yon cerulean plain,
Sublimely shines thy sacred fane,
The graces wait its portal nigh,
Which perfect shall endure thro' vast eternity.

"Come, and thy gracious aid impart,
Each perishing pursuit to tame;
O root out folly from my heart,
And thou the full possession claim.
Each roving wish, each vain desire,
O purge with thy celestial fire;
What is the world's, the people's gaze?
Hence with the hubble fame, and idle breath of praise!

"Whether, adown the stream of time,
I pass with easy prosp'rous sails;
Or o'er its waves I painful climb,
Forlorn and toss'd by stormy gales;

Still let me check the wanton breeze,
Nor be absorb'd in slothful ease;
But stedfast steer, when tempests rise
That rend my shatter'd bark, or mount it to the skies.

"So come what will, the adverse scene,
Or fortune's gay alluring smile,
Soon shall I keep my soul serene,
Superior to all sinful guile;
Then, whether Fate's resistless sheers,
Shall clip my thread in ripen'd years;
Or, in my *Pride*, my doom be spoke,
Undaunted shall I yield, and fearless meet the stroke."

Evans was an ardent patriot. His *Heroic Stanzas, On the Successes of his Majesty's Arms, and the Greatness of the English Nation*; 1762, glow with ardour.

"Well doth Britannia the fair path pursue,
Which ancient Rome with glory trod before;
Abroad, each haughty tyrant to subdue,
At home, t'increase each happy subject's store."

One will scan the poet's lines in vain, for a single trace of cynicism or revolt. The barrenness of cultural interests in America alone arouses a protest.

For the commencement of the College of Philadelphia, May 17th, 1763, he composed *an / exercise; / containing, / a dialogue and ode / On occasion of the peace*; and the same was duly performed. This interesting work consists of a dialogue between Horatio, Palemon, and Philander. With peace, better days will come.

"The useless rampart shall its strength resign,
And o'er the bastion spread the curling vine;
Th'aspiring ivy round old tow'rs shall stray,
And in the trenches harmless flocks shall play;
The crystal streams shall flow without a strain,
The groves bloom spotless, and each flow'ry plain;
Countries oppress'd by war's destructive rage,
Again revive to bless a milder age;
In the same fields where groves of lances rose,
The furrow'd grain shall golden ranks compose.

"Oh haste, fair *peace*! begin thy pleasing reign;
Come, with each lovely virtue in thy train;
Then pure Religion's precepts shall prevail,
Impartial justice poize her balanc'd scale;
Bright liberty shall wanton in the breeze,
Innoxious pleasure, philosophic ease,
Heart-cheering mirth, and plenty ever gay,
With rosy joy shall tend thy gentle sway!"

Two attempts at Latin verse are included in the volume. Evans wrote a poem to William Lauder, P. P. (*Ad Gulielmum Lauderum, P. P.*) in Sapphic and Adonic verse; side by side, he gave his English rendering. The concluding stanza will serve as a sample.

“Umbra seu pulvis sumus aut inanis
Fumus, et nostrum remanebit olim
Nil nisi virtus, monumenta sacra
Ingeniique.”

It is rendered in the vernacular, as:-

“Shadows we are, or empty dust,
And vapour-like dissolve we must,
Nor are we more secure;
Nought can escape the dreary pit
But virtue and immortal wit,
Which endless shall endure.”

A Latin *Carmen Pastorale* in dactylic hexameter is followed by an English version in heroic couplets.

The celebrated Franklin, who had already snatched the lightning from heaven, was not overlooked by his fellow-townsmen. Evans came forward with an ambitious poem, *To Benjamin Franklin, Esq; L. L. D. Occasioned by hearing him play on the Harmonica*. The musical accomplishments of that most versatile personality have been rather subordinated; but to the aesthetic temperament of the young poet, they were of primary moment. The scientific discoveries are duly noted; then the poet passes on to the artistic.

“What wonder struck us when we did survey
The lambent lightnings innocently play,
And down thy rods beheld the dreaded fire
In a swift flame descend—and then expire;
While the red thunders, roaring loud around,
Burst the black clouds, and harmless smite the ground.

“Blest use of art! apply’d to serve mankind,
The noble province of the sapient mind!
For the soul’s best faculties were giv’n,
To trace great nature’s laws from earth to heav’n!

“Yet not these themes alone thy thoughts command,
Each softer science owns thy fostering hand;
Aided by thee Urania’s heav’nly art,
With finer raptures charms the feeling heart;
Th’ *Harmonica* shall join the sacred choir,
Fresh transports kindle, and new joys inspire—

“Hark! the soft warblings, sounding smooth and clear,
Strike with celestial ravishment the ear,

Conveying inward, as they sweetly roll,
A tide of melting music to the soul;
And sure if aught of mortal-moving strain,
Can touch with joy the high angelic train.
'Tis this enchanting instrument of thine,
Which speaks in accents more than half divine!"

On the Aeolian Harp is another poem, in which Evans voices his love of music. *An Epistle to Myra* follows.

The poet pays his tribute to science in an oration delivered in the hall of his college. We have copied this poem in its entirety, as it represents the author's intellectual ideals.

AN ORATION ON SCIENCE. SPOKEN AT A PERFORMANCE OF SOLEMN MUSIC AND ORATORY. IN THE HALL OF THE COLLEGE OF PHILADELPHIA.

"In Wisdom's lore the tender mind to frame,
The youthful breast to fire with virtue's flame,
The thoughts to raise, the passions to control,
And plant each godlike purpose in the soul;
To SCIENCE this illustrious field assign'd,
To beam the rays of knowledge o'er mankind;
For this were plan'd the noble laws of art,
T'unfold the embryo powers of the heart;
To guide each movement to its native goal,
And scan the systems of this mighty whole!

"Heav'n has on man the *reasoning* gift bestow'd,
And in his breast *sublime ideas* sow'd;
But as it fares with rich luxuriant land,
When left to chance, nor till'd by culture's hand,
For fragrant flowers the rankling weeds arise,
Poison the plains and all their charms disguise;
So when the thoughts are in a lawless state,
Which in the mind's fair garden vegetate,
Soon shall intentions foul pollute the breast,
Like noxious weeds that flow'ry lawns infest.

"Nor more distinguish'd in creation's chain
Is man, by reason, o'er the bestial train,
Than man from man, by *education* made,
When native sense by *Science* is array'd,
When ev'ry faculty matur'd by skill,
Obeys the dictates of the sapient will;
Then led by *Science*, fancy wings her flight
Round the wide world, or to the realms of light,
Extracting wisdom from each scene below,
Or soaring 'mid the radiant planets glow;
Where, wonder struck!—she finds their sparkling rays,
But bright reflections from the solar blaze!
And views with steady eyes those *wandering* stars,
That fright the world with prodigies and wars!

“By SCIENCE youthful minds are taught to know,
What to their God, their Country, *Friends*, they owe;
Life’s glorious scope, and whence it first began,
What springs direct the Microcosm, Man;
What bids a savage like a sage to shine,
Or makes an *Attila* an *Antonine*;
All that ennoble man’s exalted race,
All that *Religion*, *Virtue*, *Truth* embrace!
’Tis *hers* with loftier feelings to inspire,
And fit a mortal for the heavenly choir!”

We have now reached the occasion when Nathaniel Evans bade his beloved *alma mater* farewell, and left the companionship of the Reverend Doctor Smith and the little group of teachers to assume the responsibilities of mature manhood. At the time of receiving his Master of Arts degree, he presented a poem, entitled, *Verses, addressed to the Trustees of the College and Academy of Philadelphia. Written and pronounced as an Exercise at the Public Commencement, May 30, 1765, on taking the Degree of M. A. in said College*. In it he extolled the Trustees for raising the Muse’s seat in this fair land, to fan the fires of civilisation, to improve the manners and exalt the heart, to “train the rising race in wisdom’s lore, / and teach them virtue’s summit to explore.” In their work, he perceived something divine. But regret filled his heart, at leaving.

“O haste, blest days! till ign’rance flee the ball,
And the bright rays of knowledge lighten all,
Till in yon wild new seats of Science rise,
And such as you the arts shall patronize!
For this your names shall swell the trump of fame,
And ages yet unborn your worth proclaim.”

It was during this year that Evans prepared the edition of his friend Godfrey’s poems. We have now reached the turning-point in our subject’s career. We shall see how the young man rings true to his principles and aspirations when he leaves the cloistered atmosphere of his native town and enters upon the more complex field which awaits him.

PART II

EVANS THE PRIEST

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, since its incorporation in 1701, had sought to procure for the British colonies a supply of reliable missionaries. Up to the time of the Revolutionary War, most of the Anglican clergymen in all the American colonies, except Maryland, Virginia, and Florida, received a large part of their stipend from the Venerable Society, as it was called, or, more familiarly, the S. P. G. Communities desirous of a Church of England missionary made application to the London headquarters; and, if possible and expedient, response was soon forthcoming.

On the 20th of September, 1765, a letter was read before the board of the S. P. G. from "the Episcopal Inhabitants in Waterford township and Places adjacent in the County of Gloucester, West Jersey," showing that said township had been long settled and was very populous; that a considerable number of the inhabitants were of the Church of England, but were wholly destitute of the offices of religion, there being no settled minister in that part of the country, and no Anglican missionary between Burlington and Cape May. Territory some two hundred miles in length and about sixty miles broad was without Church ministrations. "Filled with the melancholy Apprehensions of increasing Ignorance, and of seeing our Children fall into total Irreligion," the people wrote the Society, they had erected a Church about twelve years before. Occasionally the Reverend William Sturgeon had visited them from Philadelphia—that is, as often as his duty and the weather would permit. They declared that Waterford was an extensive township; and that many of its inhabitants had joined with a considerable congregation at Gloucester, and had agreed to pay an annual salary amounting to about £ 110 New Jersey currency (approximately £ 65 sterling) for the support of a missionary and to provide a house for him. This obligation they had lodged with the Reverend Doctor William Smith of Philadelphia. Therefore, they prayed that the Society would appoint a missionary to be employed alternately between Gloucester and Cole's Church in the town of Waterford, and occasionally to visit as many more of the destitute places of the county of Gloucester as possible. They further prayed that the bearer of their petition, Mr. Nathaniel Evans, who had been educated in the College of Philadelphia and was well recommended, might be appointed among them and encouraged by the usual bounty of the Venerable Society. "We are conscious that our Contributions, tho' as large as our Circumstances can admit, will be far short of a sufficient Support, or such a one as we are persuaded his merit will entitle him to expect." (1)

(1) S. P. G. B-24, No. 123 (Stevens and Brown Transcript in the Library of Congress).

A similarly worded petition was sent from the town of Gloucester, likewise endorsing Mr. Evans. (2)

Dr. Smith had been regarded as a sort of Mentor by the struggling Anglican congregations in the vicinity of Philadelphia. When the people of Gloucester and Waterford sought his advice, he thought of his promising young pupil. Immediately after the commencement, Evans embarked for England to secure ordination into the ministry, so that he might supply the proposed Gloucester county mission. Arriving in England, he was ordained by Doctor Richard Terrick, the Lord Bishop of London. Dr. Smith tells us that the Bishop "expressed great satisfaction in his examination, and particularly, in the perusal of an elegant English piece which he composed in a few minutes, upon a *Theological* question, which he was desired to give his sentiments upon." (3)

In the volume of poems published in 1772, we find an Epitaph in memory of Mrs. Margaret Robinson, who died March 22nd, 1765, and who was buried in St. Catherine's Church, London. It is probable that Evans was asked to compose the same during his short stay in the capital.

He did not linger in England long. He seemed anxious to undertake the duties of his field. On his way back to America, he became acquainted with Elizabeth Graeme (later Mrs. Ferguson); and with her he carried on a correspondence in verse. It was to her and to his teacher, Doctor William Smith, that he committed his papers before his death—those papers from which the volume of his poems was compiled and published.

Upon landing at Philadelphia, December 26th, 1765, he lost no time but proceeded to his mission. In a letter to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, February 25th, 1766, dated from Haddonfield, New Jersey, he tells of his safe arrival. "After a few days tarrying with my Friends I proceeded without further delay to the place of my Appointment, the New Mission of Gloucester (*sic*). The people received him "with great marks of Satisfaction & Kindness, and yet, have behaved with unalterable Civility & Respect. And expresses their Thankfulness and Gratitude for the Indulgence they have recd from the Venerable Society." As the members of the Established Church in his mission had never had an Episcopal minister "fix'd among them," he suggested, "perhaps Novelty may at present somewhat heighten their Zeal; and therefore I chuse to allow them a little longer time to evince the Sincerity of their Religious Professions before I presume to be too confident in their praise to the Venerable Society. But I flatter myself, Sir, that I shall not be disappointed in my warm Expectations of them."

The building known as Cole's Church was finished. He expected to have another Church, in Gloucester Town, built of brick, and ready

(2) *Ibid.*, No. 124.

(3) Sketch of Evans, by the Rev. William Smith, prefixed to Evans: Poems (1772), p. iv.

for use early in the fall. The two congregations—Cole's Church and Gloucester—had secured their young parson a house, with about twelve acres of ground, on a five year lease. The house was situated at Haddonfield, which was described as a small town in the center of the two congregations.

Evans realized that he had ample opportunity to prove of service to his flock. "There are sundry People in this Mission who being unsatisfied with the Modes of Worship as practis'd by divers sorts of Dissenters have for some time pass't not join'd with any particular Society, and who now frequent the Church, and appear to be much pleas'd with that purity of Devotion and liberality of Sentiment, which breathes through the Liturgy of our Church, and I trust, with the Divine Blessing, that much good may be done in this New Mission, not only in gathering together such as have been educated in the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church, but in attaching such to it who for want of a Form of Worship to their mind have heretofore assembl'd with no Communion whatever." Next spring, he said, it was his intention to visit the remote parts of the mission and get acquainted with a "further state of this country." In the meantime, he promised his loyalty and devotion. "I beg leave to assure the Venerable Society that the best of my mean Abilities and Earnest Endeavours & Applications shall at no time be wanting, in my humble Sphere, to serve the blessed Cause which they so much desire to promote." (4)

The next letter of Evans to the Venerable Society is dated from Haddonfield, December 12th, 1766. The missionary reported that since his settlement in the field, he had been uniform in his attendance on the two congregations—Gloucester and Waterford—preaching at the two places alternately; that he had also served the people widely scattered through his parish, as opportunity presented itself. He had visited his scattered flock on week-days and had preached to them, wherever a few Church families had settled. He names the settlements—Long Coming, Timber Creek, Mantua Creek, and Pennsaukin Creek. During the spring, he felt that his services were better employed in the interior parts of the country, and he had avoided leaving his two regular congregations; but in the fall, he had gone to Egg Harbour, and had traveled the shore over, fully thirty miles, and had preached daily, always using the Book of Common Prayer. At Egg Harbour and Cape May, he had found about fifty Church families—English and Swedish. The other inhabitants were Quakers and Presbyterians. There he preached in two dissenting meeting-houses at the request of the people, and used the Church of England liturgy, at which the people appeared well pleased. He found the inhabitants in general well disposed, but much in need of instruction. They knew little about the doctrine, and much less about the discipline, of the Church of England, since there had never had been an Anglican minister in the county before.

"When I first arrived among them, and what Church Families there was had so contracted the Manners & Ways of the Dissenters, especially

(4) S. P. G. B-24, No. 125 (Stevens and Brown transcript in the Library of Congress).

Quakers, as to be very indifferent too (*sic*), and awkward in joining Divine Service; so that scarcely more than six Persons knew how to use the Common Prayer in my two Congregations, of Gloucester and Waterford, altho' at the latter Church I have sometimes had about three hundred People—but they have since been much improved, and the Liturgy is grown greatly in esteem and made use of—having preach'd sundry times upon that Subject, and endeavour'd to point out the Excellency of our Service & the Propriety of such a Form. Many People in this County, who formerly went to no Place of Public Worship now regularly attend Church, and tho' they continue unbaptized are most evidently reformed in their Behaviour and Conversation. There are several that ride twenty miles on Sundays to attend Church."

Frequently a considerable number of Quakers attended his Church. "My present Situation is in the Center of Quakers, who are a majority of the People in this County, and with whom I live in great harmony, and in an intercourse of mutual Civility."

Mr. Evans said that his parish was about thirty miles long and sixty miles wide. It contained about six thousand souls, white and black. The greater part of the inhabitants were Quakers. The rest of the people were about equally divided between the Established Church, the Swedish Lutherans, and the Presbyterians. The necessity of being baptised had not yet impressed the people, he added, though he had endeavoured to inculcate that doctrine. Uncommon sickness had prevailed in those parts, and had prevented the erection of a Church at Gloucester that year. There had also been great scarcity of money. Still he had the use of a very commodious brick court-house at Gloucester for the services. "It is to the scarcity of Money likewise that I attribute the People's Remissness in discharging their annual Subscriptions for my Maintenance."

Several times Evans had preached at Mount Holly, where he had found a decent and serious congregation, and a neat little Church painted within and without. Since the late Mr. Campbell's death—the Reverend Colin Campbell—he had also preached at Burlington. He proposed visiting Salem, as there was a Church and congregation in that town, though much reduced. It was seldom that a minister visited there. (5)

A few weeks later (January 20th, 1767), Evans addressed the Secretary of the S. P. G. again. The vacant congregations of Burlington and Mount Holly had proposed uniting their two churches in one mission, and had invited him to accept the charge. Should the Society consent, he would do so. The Gloucester county mission had proved so extensive, that he found that his income was exceeded by his expense, "though I have used more economy since I have lived here, than ever I did before. The people have been greatly remiss in their Subscriptions for my Support, and are now £ 100 this Currency in Arrears to me, one fourth part of which I have little Reason to expect. And to

(5) *Ibid.*, No. 126.

press them for my Due I fear would only lessen the Church, without any advantage to myself." Still he sympathized with his congregations. The Church at Waterford was "indeed deserving, and I shall not remit my Affection for many of its members, though I should leave this mission." On Christmas day, he had administered the Lord's Supper at that place for the first time, and had eleven communicants. (6)

The last letter written by Evans to the Society (Haddonfield, April 20th, 1767) shows that he was struggling hard and doing his best. He had learned that a minister had been appointed to Burlington, and, of course, he could not expect a transfer. The communion service which he had held at Waterford at Christmas was the first celebration ever held there. When he held his Easter communion there, the communicants had increased in number from eleven to fifteen. "The Church here on Particular Days is always much crouded, and is commonly well filled." Since December 14th, he had baptised eighteen children and two adults. Many Quakers and Dissenters flocked to hear him, and with them he lived "in great Peace and Cordiality."

He had but small hopes of seeing a Church built at Gloucester. The congregation at that place contained "about half a dozen steady churchmen in it, that are pretty good Livers, others of it that are Men of Substance are again Slid into that supineness, which I had hopes they were shaking of (*sic*) when I first came among them—the sad Effect of a luke-warm Habit to any kind of Religion! Others of this Congregation who are more willing are poor and of no Ability; so that what few among them are Men of Zeal and Spirit, I am afraid are not of sufficient strength to erect a Church. There are many difficulties in forming New Congregations in a Mission, where there are a Majority of Sectaries, that few can have an adequate Idea of till they make the Tryal."

He felt, however, that he had done his utmost. "This I can truly say that my best Endeavours have not been wanting to advance the Interest of the Christian Religion, as taught by our Church, in these Parts. And while it is my Lot to remain here, I shall not (with God's blessing) slacken my Diligence in this Matter. Though my Success has not been so great in this Mission as I first expected, yet, I bless God, my labours have not been entirely in vain. Many have been sensibly touch'd with Religion, which they show by bringing forth the fruits of good living and the practice of unaffected Piety. Before this Mission was open'd, the Church of England in this County was at an extreme low Ebb, but has since much increas'd, and grown into a good deal of Consideration. And bating the deficiency, in both Congregations, in paying their Quotas towards my Support, no Minister could desire to be treated, in a plain way, with more affection and respect by his People than I am." He had received from Governor William Franklin a present of two very elegant folio prayer books for his two congregations. (7)

(6) *Ibid.*, No. 127.

(7) *Ibid.*, No. 129.

Evans could not have left a more impressive portrayal of his ministry. In this unconscious valedictory, addressed to those patrons who had supplemented his meagre income, he drew the clear but simple sketch of a pastor, earnest and untiring, devoted to duty and unsparing of self, zealous for the welfare of his people, and living in harmony with those who differed from him.

Poetry seems to have been relegated to the background. The man of letters was merged into the clergyman, throwing his whole soul into the solution of new problems. There are a few short poems which may have dated from the period of Evans' ministry; if Doctor Smith pursued a chronological method in arranging the verses, as he seems to have done in the collection, we may safely assign *To Clarinda*; *The Morning Invitation, to Two Young Ladies at the Gloucester Spring*; *Fragments and unfinished pieces*; *To Melancholy*; and *On Solitude* to the last two years of the poet's life. There is included a parody on some lines from Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*, which recalls a minister's quiet day and reminds us that the hard-pressed clergyman had not lost his sense of humour.

"How happy is the country Parson's lot?
Forgetting *Bishops*, as by *them* forget;
Tranquil of spirit, with an easy mind,
To all his *Vestry's* votes he sits resign'd:
Of manners gentle, and of temper even,
He jogs his flocks, with easy pace, to heaven.
In Greek and Latin, pious books he keeps;
And, while his Clerk sing psalms, he—soundly sleeps.

"His garden fronts the sun's sweet orient beams,
And fat church-wardens prompt his golden dreams.
The earliest fruit, in his fair orchard, blooms;
And cleanly pipes pour out tobacco's fumes.
From rustic bridegroom oft he takes the ring;
And hears the milk-maid plaintive ballads sing.
Back-gammon cheats whole winter nights away,
And Pilgrim's Progress helps a rainy day."

One of Mr. Evans's sermons has come down to us. It is bound in the volume of his poems. It is entitled: "The love of the world incompatible with the love of God; a discourse on I John II. 15, 16, 17;" and is addressed "to the members of the congregation of Gloucester." Dated at Haddonfield, April 18th, 1766, it was written by a clergyman with an actual pastoral experience of less than one third of a year. In it, we find the protest against the world's distraction, which interfere with spiritual growth. Man cannot serve God and mammon. The following example will illustrate the author's style.

"He whose soul is set upon temporal pleasure and pursuits, will rarely find leisure for any secret communion with the Father of Spirits, or feel any inclination to enjoy so blessed a privilege. . . . If we are in love with the world,

our thoughts will altogether be engaged in mean, selfish views. Earthly happiness will be the sole mark we shall aim at, and whatever may interfere with, or throw a check upon such a career, will be ever disgusting in our eyes."

Dr. Smith declared that young Evans gave rare promise as a preacher. In the tribute which he composed for the collection of poems, he commented on his friend's ability both in pastoral work and in the pulpit.

"(He) alas! but just lived long enough to shew, by the goodness of his temper, the purity of his morals, the cheerfulness and affability of his conversation, the sublimity and soundness of his doctrines, and the warmth of his *Pulpit Compositions*, how well he was qualified for the sacred office, to which he had now wholly devoted himself." (8)

Evans died of consumption at Haddonfield, October 29th, 1767. His death was deeply lamented by all who knew him, especially his congregations. Two obituary notices bear witness to the esteem in which he was held.

The Pennsylvania Chronicle, No. 41, November 2nd, 1767, gave the following account:-

"On Thursday last departed this Life, in the 25th Year of his Age, the Reverend NATHANIEL EVANS M. A. Missionary from the Society to the Churches of Gloucester and Cole's-Town, in New Jersey, and Chaplain to the Right Hon. Lord * * * * *

"His Remains were brought from Haddenfield to this City on Saturday last and agreeable to his Desire, interred in Christ Church. His Pall was supported by the Clergy of different Denominations, and a Sermon suitable to the Mournful Occasion, preached by the Rev. Mr. (Richard) PETERS, Rector of Christ Church, &c. from Numbers xxiii; 10.

"The Death of this amiable young Gentleman cannot but be sincerely lamented by all who had the Happiness of his Acquaintance. It is a public as well as private Loss. His aged Parents have been hereby deprived of an only Child, the best and most dutiful of sons; His Friends, of one whose Conversation could seldom fail of entertaining and improving them: His Congregations of a faithful and affectionate Pastor, to whom they were united by the most solemn and endearing Ties; and the Church in general, of a Minister, whose early Piety, added to a most remarkable Sprightliness of Genius, Quickness of Apprehension, and animated

(8) Sketch of Evans, by the Rev. William Smith, prefixed to Evans: Poems (1772), p. iv.

Turn of Expression, was a sure Presage of his future Usefulness in the Exercise of that sacred Office, to which he was called.

“During his Sickness, he was attended with much Bodily Pain and Anguish, he behaved with such Meekness, Patience, and Resignation, as were sure Evidences of internal Peace and Tranquility, and were sufficient to convince his surrounding Friends, that he had given himself up to the immediate and sole Direction of that blessed Spirit, whose Presence alone can speak Peace to the Tumults of Nature, and enable the expiring Christian to cry out, with an holy Confidence, in his departing Moments, *Father, into thy Hands I commend my Spirit.*” (9)

The Pennsylvania Gazette, No. 2028, of November 5th, 1767, also spoke of the deceased with admiration.

“On Thursday last died, in his 25th Year, the Reverend NATHANIEL EVANS, M. A. Missionary to the Society for Gloucester County, in New-Jersey; the only and most dutiful Child of his aged and affectionate Parents; a Gentleman, who, in his early Youth, had given such Specimens of an amiable Disposition, fervent Piety, exalted Genius, quick Apprehension, warm imagination, and animated Turn of Expression, that there was the utmost Reason to hope he would have become an Ornament to his sacred Profession, had it pleased God to spare him to a longer Date.

“His Remains, attended by a respectable Number of his sorrowful Parishioners, were attended from Haddonfield, the Place of his Residence, to this City, on Saturday last, and, agreeable to his Desire, interred in Christ Church. His Pall was supported by the Clergy of Different Denominations, and a Sermon suitable to the mournful Occasion, preached by the Rev. Mr. PETERS, Rector of Christ Church, &c. from Numbers xxiii. 10.” (10)

Mr. Peters used as his text:—“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!”

That the death of Mr. Evans caused much grief is vouched for in the letters of his fellow-missionaries. The Reverend Jonathan Odell, who had been sent to Burlington, wrote the Society, January 6th, 1768:—

“I can not help . . . to observe to you, that his loss is much regretted, & his memory highly esteem’d by people of all denominations, wherever he was known, &

(9) This excerpt is quoted in: Archives of New Jersey, 1st series XXV., pp. 475-476.

(10) This excerpt is quoted in: Archives of New Jersey, 1st series, XXV., pp. 482-483.

particularly by his congregations, which I fear will not soon recover the promising situation into which his pious labors had brought them." (11)

Mr. Odell's apprehensions were realized. The good start made by Evans was soon lost. No successor was sent by the Society to the Gloucester county field for some time. Then the Reverend David Griffith was appointed to take charge of the work. He found the congregation at Waterford considerably diminished since the death of the late minister; and those who remained were so intermarried and connected with the Quakers, who constituted the most numerous and wealthy people, that their affection for the Church had greatly cooled. At Gloucester, there were not more than three families, so he reported February 8th, 1771, who continued steadfast to the Church of England. The rest refused to contribute at all towards its support. He adds this most illuminating observation: "This revolt seems to have been occasioned by the frequent Visits of the Late Mr. Evans's Father & other Methodist Preachers among them." It was impossible for Mr. Griffith to support his family on the scanty allowance which the people raised; and he was compelled to quit his mission. (12)

From the above, we must conclude that the father of our missionary was one of that rapidly increasing number of Methodist Preachers who were visiting the country districts and laying the foundations of a mighty movement. But Mr. Evans, Sr., did not long survive his son. The Pennsylvania Chronicle, No. 249, October 14 to October 21, 1771, contains the following item:-

"PHILADELPHIA, *October 21.*

"On the 12th Inst. departed this Life, near Gloucester, in New-Jersey Mr. EDWARD EVANS (Father of the late Reverend NATHANIEL EVANS), a Gentleman of exemplary Piety and Virtue. His remains were brought to this City and decently interred in Friends' Burying Ground." (13)

The poems and papers which Evans directed to the custody of Provost Smith and the lady whom he had met on his return from England were regarded as a sacred trust. But want of leisure delayed the publication. Doctor Smith was a busy man; and absence from the city had served as a further cause of postponement. At last the volume appeared, with this title-page:-

(11) S. P. G. B-24. No. 131 (Stevens and Brown Transcript in the Library of Congress).

(12) Ibid., No. 129.

(13) This excerpt is quoted in: Archives of New Jersey, 1st series, XXV., p. 595.

POEMS
ON
SEVERAL OCCASIONS WITH
SOME OTHER COMPOSITIONS,
BY NATHANIEL EVANS, A. M.
LATE MISSIONARY (APPOINTED BY THE SOCIETY FOR PRO-
PAGATING THE GOSPEL) FOR GLOUCESTER COUNTY,
IN NEW-JERSEY: AND CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD VIS-
COUNT KILMOREY, OF THE KINGDOM OF IRELAND.
PHILADELPHIA:
PRINTED BY JOHN DUNLAP, IN MARKET-STREET,
M.DCC.LXXII.

It was an octavo volume, with pages xxviii., 160, and 24. The size of the type-page was $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches by 6 inches. The prefatory sketch (Dr. Smith's tribute) extended from page (iii.) to page x. The list of subscribers followed—page (xi.) to page xxvi. On pages (xxvii.) and xxviii., we read: "On the death / of the / Rev. Nathaniel Evans, / Who departed this Life in his 26th Year; a dutiful / and only Son of aged and affectionate Parents. / By Laura." The poems covered the next 160 pages. The last 24 pages were given to the sermon: "The love of the world incompatible with the love of God." Sabin lists the book as 23179.

The subscribers numbered a large sprinkling of prominent people in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, as well as the remoter colonies, as far north as Quebec and Nova Scotia and as far south as Barbados. There were 989 copies subscribed for, of which 461 were taken by booksellers. Dr. Smith's recent stay in South Carolina probably accounted for the fact that 150 copies went to a couple of dealers in Charles Town. "Oliver Goldsmith, Esq., London" was among the subscribers.

Several clergymen, attorneys, and students of physic ordered copies. Governor Robert Eden of Maryland, Governor William Franklin of New Jersey, the Honourable John Penn (one of the proprietaries of the province of Pennsylvania), William Paca, Benjamin Rush, M. D. (professor of Chemistry in the College of Philadelphia), the Right Honourable Lord Balgonie, the Honourable Colonel Bulkeley (secretary of Nova Scotia), Joseph Galloway, Esq. (speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly), Richard Huck, M. D. (physician to St. Thomas's Hospital, London), Thomas Jennings, Esq. (attorney-general of Maryland), John Morgan, M. D. (professor of the Theory and Practice of Physic in the College of Philadelphia), the Reverend John Smith (member of the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania), Philip Van Cortlandt, Esq., of Jamaica, Long Island, and Mr. Anthony Wayne, of East-Town, Chester county, were all subscribers.

In the conclusion of his preface, Doctor Smith introduced some thoughts on the subject of poetry, which Evans, he said, had undoubtedly written in the short interval between his last dangerous illness, and that fatal relapse, which put an end to his life. "This Preface I shall give literally as he left it; for here the least variation would be criminal." We are quoting it at length:-

"Poetry . . . has been accounted the most *peculiar* of all the liberal arts; and it is the only *One*, in the circle of literature, which a man of common capacity cannot, by *meer* dint of constant application, become master of. The most exalted *prose writers* that ever graced the learned world, have rendered themselves liable to ridicule in their addresses to the MUSES."

"The great *Cicero*, not less famous for the elegance of his style, than for his universal knowledge, was a remarkable instance of the truth of this observation. And the wonder ceases, if what a celebrated Critic (RAPIN) says, be true, to wit—That to constitute a POET, is required '*an elevation of soul, that depends not only on art and study, but must also BE THE GIFT OF HEAVEN.*' I say, if this be the case, the riddle is immediately expounded, and we are at no loss to assign a reason, why some, (comparatively speaking) *illiterate men*, have been the sublimest poets of the age they lived in."

"It is not strange, therefore, that those whom nature has thus distinguished, should be looked on as a kind of prodigies in the world. For, according to Horace, it is not a trifling power the man is endued with—

—*meum qui pectus inaniter angit,*
Irritat, mulcet, falsis terroribus implet,
Ut MAGUS—

LIB. II. EPIST. I.

"THERE is a pleasing *Je ne scay quoi* in the productions of poetic genius, which is easier felt than described. It is the *voice of nature* in the POET, operating like a charm on the soul of the reader. It is the *marvellous conception*, the *noble wildness*, the *lofty sentiment*, the *fire and enthusiasm* of spirit, the *living imagery*, the *exquisite choice of words*, the *variety*, the *sweetness*, the *majesty of numbers*, and the irresistible *magic of expression*.

"The *prose writer*, may indeed warm his Reader with a *serene and steady fire*; he may keep up his attention, with the *energetic*, the *flowing period*. But the POET'S it is, to *wrap him in a flame*—to dissolve him, as it were, in his own *rapturous blaze*! The POET'S it is, to hurry him *out of himself*, with the same velocity, as though he were really

mounted on a winged Pegasus—It is his to lift him up to Heaven, or plunge him unto the gloom of Tartarus—It is his, to unveil to him the secrets of the deep, or to exhibit to his mind, all the novelty of this varied world—to carry him back into the darkness of antiquity; or waft him forwards into the vast sea of futurity—and finally, to inspire him with the patriot glow, or fire his soul with the heavenly ideas of MORAL BEAUTY, and all the varied passions of Love, Fear, Terror, Compassion, &c. &c.”

“Such is the genuine Poet, when improved by the precepts of Art; and the works of such have been the continual delight of mankind, as they afford the sublimest intellectual enjoyment. With such, to tread the flowery fields of imagination, and gather the rich fruits of knowledge, is HAPPINESS indeed!”

“But it is rare, that such Natural Geniuses are seen to arrive at this envied height. Some black obstacle still clogs their wings, and retards their progress—Frequently those to whom Nature has been thus bountiful, have not leisure to attend to the cultivation of their talents—frequently, like the rose in the wilderness, they just bloom, and wither away in obscurity; and sometimes, alas! the iron-hand of DEATH cuts them SUDDENLY off, as their beauties are just budding forth into existence, and leaves but the FAIR PROMISE OF FUTURE EXCELLENCIES.”

On this little dissertation, Doctor Smith makes the following comment:-

“FURTHER his pen went not—what a dreadful blank closes the foregoing sentence, and how truly prophetic of his own fate? (sic). He DIED in his TWENTY-SIXTH Year—He was my PUPIL, and truly dear and affectionate to me in his whole demeanor—If I had not the original, in his own hand to produce, I should have been afraid to publish this Preface, as his, lest it should be suspected to have been written after his death, and accommodated to that event.”

Years later, Richard Penn Smith, a grandson of Doctor William Smith, paid a tribute to the young poet—a tribute which may well conclude this study. He said:-

“If the rigid canons of criticism will not allow the name of Evans to be inscribed among those of the inspired children of poesy and song, yet the cause of virtue requires that there be some memorial of one, who embodied in harmonious verse, the chaste conceptions and moral excellencies of a well regulated mind! Apart from the merit which might be claimed for him by his admirers, on account of

the supposed beauties which can be found in his writings, the demand of justice is interposed, that there be rendered to his amiable character and pure life the deserved tribute of esteem and honour. Especially is this called for, since circumstances, distinctly unfavourable at the time of his brief career in life, have heretofore prevented an exhibition of the claims which rest upon his countrymen for their admiration and respect." (14)

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- (14) Horace Wemyss Smith: *Life and Correspondence of the Rev. William Smith, D. D., I.*, p. 479.

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